

Racial and Ethnic Disparities in the Child Welfare System

Recommendations for Federal Policy

Recommendation 1:

The General Accounting Office should conduct a study of disproportionality and disparity in child welfare in order to:

- Raise national awareness about the nature and extent of the problem;
- Identify structural factors contributing to disproportionately poor outcomes for African American and other children of color; and
- Identify promising strategies to improve racial equity in treatment and outcomes.

Recommendation 2:

HHS should produce an annual Report on Racial Equity in Child Welfare Performance.

HHS should publish an annual **Report on Racial Equity in Child Welfare Performance** using AFCARS data to track and report the extent to which racial and ethnic disproportionality and disparities exist in child welfare. The purpose of the **Report on Racial Equity in Child Welfare Performance** is to provide a national summary as well as a state-by-state breakdown regarding the level of racial disproportionality and disparity in child welfare treatments, experiences, and outcomes.

Although AFCARS collects data by race/ethnicity, the AFCARS annual report does not provide an analysis about the level of racial equity or inequity in child welfare systems treatment, experiences and outcomes, despite the fact that the data are there to do so. Once established the annual report can set a national benchmark for holding state and county level child welfare leaders accountable for a reduction in the level of racial disproportionality and disparity in the child welfare system.

Given the significant rates of disproportionality and disparity in child welfare, racial equity is an appropriate framework for holding child welfare leaders across jurisdictions accountable, beginning with the decision to substantiate incidences of abuse or neglect and continuing through the implementation of exit strategies for youth who are leaving or aging out of the foster care system. Ultimately both the NCANDS and National Youth in Transition Data should be linked with AFCARS data in order to ensure a more comprehensive effort to track and improve institutional behaviors at key decision points within the child welfare system.

Recommendation 3:

Encourage the use of discretionary funding from Child Welfare Research and Development Funds under Title IV-E, Title IV-B and CAPTA to establish demonstration grants using evidence-based strategies to address disproportionality and disparities in 5-6 target sites.

- The Children’s Bureau should make the implementation of strategies to reduce racial disparities a research and demonstration priority in the next fiscal year;
- HHS should encourage states to form public-private partnerships and to match federal appropriations “set-asides” for these purposes.

Recommendation 4:

The Federal Child and Family Services Review (CFSR) process should be modified to specifically assess racial disparities in outcomes for children and youth.

Ongoing state assessment of racial equity in child welfare outcomes should become part of the CFSR process. The CFSR has three major components: a statewide assessment; an on-site review and report on state performance, and state program improvement plans. HHS should incorporate an assessment of racial equity into the measurement framework for achieving “substantial conformity” on the six national performance standards. Further, the state self-assessment should explicitly examine the causes of racial disparities in treatment and outcomes.

Recommendation 5:

State Program Improvement Plans that are developed as a result of the CFSR process should include evidence-based strategies to reduce racial disparities in treatment and outcomes.

Similar to the Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Act to address disproportionate minority confinement within the Juvenile Justice System, states should be required to address racial disparities in their required Program Improvement Plans (PIPs) and as a condition of continued federal funding. Congress could also consider appropriating incentive funds to states that implement evidence-based strategies to address racial disparities as part of their PIPs.

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